

Essay Writing: Paragraphs

A paragraph consists of a topic sentence, a number of support sentences and an optional concluding sentence.

Paragraph structure

Topic Sentence
Support Sentence 1
Support Sentence 2
Support Sentence 3
Support Sentence n
Concluding Sentence (optional)

The topic sentence

In most cases, the first sentence of a paragraph is the topic sentence. The topic sentence tells you what the paragraph will be about. From a good topic sentence, you should be able to predict the content of the paragraph.

The support sentences

The topic sentence is followed by the support sentences. Support sentences expand on the topic sentence. The material in the support sentences should be presented in a systematic way. Order of importance, chronological order, order of operations or space order are most frequently used.

The concluding sentence

The concluding sentence summarises the main point of the paragraph. It often re-states the idea in the topic sentence using different words. Not all paragraphs have a concluding sentence.

Checklist

To write a paragraph

Step 1 - Write the topic sentence

The best starting point for a paragraph is a topic sentence. If you are writing the paragraph in response to a specific question, this should not be a difficult task because the wording of the question will assist you.

Step 2 - Brainstorm

Once you have written the topic sentence, you need to think of ideas to support it. Try brainstorming. Jot down anything that relates to your topic sentence: facts, details or examples. This might only take a few minutes, but it is an important part of the writing process.

Step 3 - Plan

Brainstorming will probably provide you with more ideas than you require. Read over what you have written, and cross out those ideas which do not obviously relate to the topic sentence. Arrange the remaining ideas in the order you wish to present them in your paragraph.

Step 4 - Write the first draft

The first draft should include all the ideas in your plan. It is a good idea to use every second line if you are writing the first draft on paper. This makes revision and editing much easier. Once you have finished writing the first draft, think about what you have written. You might consider a concluding sentence. Write one if you think it is necessary to complete the paragraph.

Step 5 - Revise and edit

Revising and editing your paragraph means rethinking and rewriting. It may involve making additions or corrections, rewriting sentences or rearranging details. Ask yourself the following questions

1. Is the topic sentence clear and relevant?
2. Do the facts, details and examples explain/develop the topic sentence?
3. Is there enough support?
4. Is the material presented in a systematic way?
5. Does one sentence lead smoothly to the next?

Step 6 - Check grammar, spelling and punctuation

Step 7 - Write the final draft

Step 8 - Proofread your paragraph